

Summary of

Strengthening Democracy Programme (SDP), Mid-Term Review

I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 The UNDP Strengthening Democracy Programme (SDP) in Cambodia (2011-2013) provided for an independent, external mid-term review. The review took place over the course of approximately three weeks in September of 2013.
- 1.2 The TOR for the MTR outlined several objectives. They were: a) to assess SDP's progress towards the achievements of the project outputs and contributions to the overall expected outcome of the project and the aligned goals of the CPAP; b) Assess factors and constraints that impeded progress towards achieving expected outputs and outcomes; c) to analyze the SDP's implementation strategy, including the utilization of partners, and; d) to make specific recommendations on required adjustments at the mid-term point of implementation in order to progress more efficiently and effectively to achieve expected outputs, outcomes with specific reference to the goals of the CPAP.
- 1.3 In carrying out the assessment the team consulted secondary sources (reports and commentaries on progress of democracy in Cambodia, UNDP documents, NGO reports including those of COMFREL, IFES, NDI etc.), face to face consultations with key stakeholder and beneficiaries of the project, donor agencies and other multi-lateral institutions such as SIDA, WB, DFID, UN Agencies, local NGOs / academia working on issues of strengthening democracy, and relevant government Ministries. Additionally, two provincial visits were undertaken and interviews with beneficiaries of the project added to the depth of understanding of the project's effectiveness to date.
- 1.4 Although quantifiable data would have been beneficial to the overall evaluation, such data was not easily available. As a result, much of this evaluation rests on qualitative assessments, interviews and consultations being the primary resources for the findings contained in this report.
- 1.5 The stated outcome of the project corresponds with Outcome 3 of the Country Programme Action Plan (CPAP): 'Effective mechanisms for dialogue, representation and participation in democratic decision-making established and strengthened'.

There are 4 corresponding indicators linked to this particular Outcome 3: a) percentage of women elected as commune councillors to increase from a baseline of 14.9% to 30% by 2015; b) % of citizens' concerns recorded in a public forum, from a baseline of zero in 2010 to 30% by 2015; c) % of sub-national councils publicly disclose information on expenditures from a baseline of 'none' to 30% in 2015. And finally, indicator 4 expects that by 2015 a MDG Committee will be formed in the Cambodian Parliament by the end of the project.
- 1.6 The ET would conclude that due to many variables the Programme is not expected to realize many of the indicators that correspond to the formal expected Outcome at the end of the project cycle in 2015, nor will the project meet most of the deliverables set forth and activities that are aligned to it.

- 1.7 Nevertheless despite constraints, the project has clearly opened up space for future sustained engagement, particularly in the area of media and democracy and civil society participation. It is recognized as the flagship 'democracy building' project in Cambodia by most partners, and if anything, the ET heard some frustration that given UNDP's historically prominent role in leading the way for reforms, that more was not achieved.**
- 1.8 The most critical variable that constrained implementation was the inability to secure anticipated non-core resource mobilization targets set forth at the design stage of the project. This RM was projected at a ratio of 1:3 core to non-core for a total budget that exceeded \$15 million over the project life cycle. This has severely hampered the project's ability to implement activities as planned.**
- 1.9 The ET would, however, see this, as an of illustration of donor partners in general retreating from Cambodia over the past few years, due to changing domestic priorities in foreign aid support, rather than viewing the lack of donor interest as an indicator of dissatisfaction with the SDP.**
- 1.10 However, another key variable that would explain gaps in implementation is clearly linked to the political landscape, where the Cambodian Peoples' Party has in essence dominated the executive and legislative branches, rendering it very difficult to 'persuade and promote' a furthering of democratization. Again, this 'difficult' political operating context could be another initiator of partners moving away from Cambodia, at least with respect to supporting the governance sector.**
- 1.11 In hindsight, therefore, at the time of conceptual design, the project's situational analysis, setting forth the context and rationale for engaging in a programme on Strengthening Democracy, was well conceived.
- 1.12 The analysis, for example, notes that per the Constitution, promulgated in 1993, the RGC set out a framework of principles and the rule of law, that were by far the most liberal in the region, and indeed globally, in guaranteeing inalienable civil rights and setting a platform for a multi-party, pluralistic democratic society. Moreover, the project notes that the RGC has put good governance at the center of its Rectangular Strategy, recognizing its importance in attaining the CMDGs.
- 1.13 Nonetheless, despite extremely liberal laws governing the political and civil rights system, the project notes with caution that Cambodia remains a highly hierarchical society symbolized by entrenched patron-client relationships. And while institutions required for the governing of a pluralistic society have been established, its functioning remains suspect and fraught with the entanglement of traditional norms, low levels of trust, a general fear and / or disinclination to participate in the political process and a weak media and a lack of a vibrant, demand-driven civil society.
- 1.14 Therefore in rightly assessing the political context in which Cambodia is governed, noting the absence of a true multi-party system, the project and UNDP has refocused its goals to prioritize 'people, participation and a democratic culture.'
- 1.15 The most critical variable is the political context in which the programme is being implemented. The Cambodian People's Party (CPP) has essentially dominated the political landscape for over 3 election cycles, and thereby ensuring a super majority in

both the national legislature and at the commune council level. The lack of a viable opposition (until this most recent election in July 2013, where the CNRP surprised many observers by taking over 60 seats), has made working with the parliament, and especially the Committees extremely difficult, as well as with other institutions such as the Commune Councils and National Elections Commission.

- 1.16 The pre-cursor to the SDP, was the Strengthening Democracy and Electoral Processes in Cambodia (SDEP). This project aimed to move beyond the 'electoral event' and electoral related assistance, to support the evolution of a 'democratic culture and information, and to enable citizens to exercise their civic rights and understand their rights under the Constitution. Nevertheless, the project's main focus was on building institutional capacity, transparency and accountability. This programme was funded for four years at approximately \$6.5 million.
- 1.17 Within UNDP's Governance Cluster of Programmes, included was a project which focused exclusively on support to the legislature—LEAP. This was phased out in 2009, along with the dedicated programmes that for almost two decades had supported the structural and legal framework of the heralded Commune Councils.
- 1.18 Therefore, at the time of this evaluation, UNDP's governance programming appears to have narrowed, or in more strategic terms, to have consolidated. This may be related to perhaps reflecting the changing scope of required interventions and to also reflect the changing priorities of donor partners as well as a recognition of the evident intransigent political landscape, which required a refocusing away from institutional strengthening, which had been the main focus in many previous programmes including the SDEP.
- 1.19 In fact, the designers of the programme, the SDP, were correct in identifying a common feature which influenced all aspects of Cambodia's Democratic environment, and this was the absence of information, both from a supply side and demand driven context. A well informed public, knowledgeable about their constitutional and civic rights and responsibilities, would, in the rationale of the formulation team, have a greater ability to influence the political as well as policy arena. Therefore the majority of the deliverables and activities under the two main components, focus on issues of Access, Freedom, Knowledge, Information, Civic Rights and other similar terms that convey this common thread woven throughout the project. Given the political landscape, as well as the prior focus of interventions, this new approach to focus on the demand side of democracy is something that the ET firmly concurs with.
- 1.20 The results of these changing contexts produced a programme document in the form of the SDP. The term 'programme' is relevant in the context of this mid-term evaluation; while other similar initiatives have been called 'projects', and a 'programme' approach refers mainly to the clustering of multi-sectoral interventions, in many respects, although focusing only on governance, this SDP intervention was structurally designed to reflect a programmatic approach to implementation.
- 1.21** The resulting project framework, intended outputs and activities therefore represented an amalgamation of activities, focus areas and beneficiaries that may have produced better results if focused on more discretely, perhaps bundled (since several seemed to the ET as repetitious, contributing to the impression of a programme that 'has bitten off more than it could chew'), or if the strategy and scope were more tightly linked. The ET in evaluating the complete list of deliverables outlined in the programme, reached the

conclusion that the programme may have attempted too much in 'covering' the gaps in democratic deficits in Cambodia. This resulted in perhaps a less strategic document that could have been more coherently structured and to date, more successful in implementation. **However, this conclusion should be to some degree juxtaposed with the earlier acknowledgement that the scope of the project was linked to a successful resource mobilization strategy that did not materialize as planned.**

- 1.22 In terms of results, it is clear to the evaluators that the 'communicative and outreach' portions of the programme were the most successful. We include in this conclusion the Loy9 programme produced by BBC Media in Action (and funded generously by Swedish SIDA), Equity TV, which although government run, by all accounts did report on issues relevant to the citizenry at large, and the engagement of civil society at the provincial levels (especially those focused on Indigenous Peoples') to better understand their civic and constitutional rights.
- 1.23 Yet, while the BBC Media in Action clearly would be the ET's choice as the most successful output of the programme, UNDP needs to assess the viability, sustainability as well as cost of continuing to fund a programme, where although outreach was commendable, the BBC remains an international organization with clearly established talent, skills, expertise etc. As such, the building of national capacity of the media seems to have fallen short of programme expectations, especially given that focusing on local media development in the context of utilizing this mechanism to further democratization was a key theme of the project. There may be better strategies available for more productive and cost-effective methods to build this capacity.
- 1.24 **Local capacity would require a clear focusing on developing the ability of the media to function within established international norms, despite the political difficulties. Tailored training of media outlets, exchange visits, international meetings held in Cambodia that bring peers, especially those from SE Asia, are just some of the potential areas to explore over the remaining two years of the project.**
- 1.25 While the need to enhance 'women's participation' was consistently reinforced, little if any concrete activities were seen by the ET. Again, this could be a result of the diffusive nature of activities, where a bundling would have generated a more coherent understanding of the true nature of a particular activity. **The ET, however, has learned that funding was not allocated to this component, which in the opinion of the Evaluation Team was an unfortunate decision within the overall strategic context of the programme.**
- 1.26 **The programme did not fare all that well in helping build national capacity, whether in the communications area or elsewhere, and especially where it was needed the most in building a 'culture of democracy'. Coordination among selected civil society organizations did not materialize as well as they could have. Again, the funding gap was prohibitive. Yet as we look ahead, in the view of the ET this should remain a priority over the next two years.**
- 1.27 The core funding of the project was set at \$4.5 million, with another \$10 million to be mobilized. Clearly at the mid - point of the programme, the conclusion would be reached that this was an unrealistic figure, and as a consequence the assessment of

results by the evaluation team would naturally speak to this relationship. It is recommended that a thorough review of the remaining budget is undertaken, measured against a reprioritized programme over the next two years. It is doubtful that greater RM efforts could achieve substantial result for the remaining two years of the project cycle, therefore efforts should focus on gains that will have future sustainability and in turn, development partner interest.

- 1.28 The Results and Resources Framework corresponded to the requirements of UNDP's rules and guidelines. Again, however, the RRF could have benefitted from a more compact set of deliverables and activities, especially when measured against the expected outputs (2), and the larger Outcome. When measured against outputs versus inputs (financial and otherwise), the ET concludes that there appears to be an imbalance in assessing of needs. This may be due to the large differentiation in focus between Components 1 and 2, where the latter maintained earlier priorities to focus on the parliament. But clearly budget over-runs did occur, particularly in the media component area, which accounted for a large part of the spending to date.
- 1.29 Outcomes per the UN Results Guidelines make it clear that not just one agency---that which is the leading implementer of the programme is solely responsible for achievement towards reaching the stated Outcome. In other words, other UN agencies, the governments, civil society and other development partners have their share of responsibility. Nevertheless, it has always been difficult to qualify or quantify the actual percentage of input provided by each of the actors involved, and as a result to provide for attribution or culpability. Regardless, as stated above, it is doubtful that the Outcome set out, will be achieved over this project cycle, which has just two years remaining.
- 1.30 On Monitoring and Evaluation, Risk Analysis and Quality Management Matrices: On the whole compliance with UNDP rules and guidelines were adhered to. It is interesting to note that in the Risk Analysis matrix, many of the conclusions reached by the ET, such as lack of funding and political will were mentioned as potentially negative obstacles to implementation. Clearly the project designers did anticipate these obstacles.
- 1.31 The management team (at the time of this review, a total of 3) was both competent and eager to deliver on expected results but was hampered by both financial constraints and a general lack of cohesion within the larger UNDP portfolio of programmes. For example, although the SDP calls for greater linkages with other projects within the portfolio, the ET did not see clear evidence that this was consistently applied. One particular point to be raised may reflect on the overall analysis of the MTR. One of the disadvantaged groups mentioned as needing capacity help was MSM (Men who have Sex with Men). The ET would conclude, while laudable, again, this might be an example where the project strayed away from its mandate, and where the issue of MSM, could potentially have been better managed by a sister UN agency such as the WHO, or UNAIDS. The promotion of women in decision making may have benefited from a partnership with UN Women, or another programme within UNDP's portfolio.
- 1.32 The implementation of the programme was further hampered by the lack of staff capacity, whose presence and recruitment was outlined at the onset of approval of the project. For example, one of the key senior members of the project was expected to be an International Chief Technical Advisor---this recruitment did not take place. There

were other positions as well, including an International Parliament and Gender Specialist, and other national experts in media, youth and in the area of political parties. Presumably, the inability to secure the required short fall in resource mobilization affected these recruitments.

- 1.33 Advisory board members met frequently and those that the ET spoke with were happy with the regularity of communication and response from UNDP. Most if not all members acknowledged the difficulties of implementing reform within a political environment as it prevails currently in Cambodia.
- 1.34 The partnership strategy of the programme did not materialize in the view of the ET. Much was stated about utilizing the capacity of CSOs, becoming more involved in regional groupings and forging South-South cooperative partnerships. Productive linkages with sister UN agencies, such as OHCHR, UN AIDS, UN Women etc., were all mentioned as critical to achieving goals. Two UN agencies, UNICEF in particular did sit on the advisory board of the SDP, however, with respect, in particular to the Youth Strategy, UNICEF's involvement appeared more advisory than active involvement in implementation. However, with respect to partnerships, the ET will continue throughout the analysis in the rest of this evaluation, to note the lack of clear and coherent engagement with CSOs, which are clearly a very important group both as implementers of activities and as beneficiaries of training.

II. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR MID-TERM ADJUSTMENTS

General

- 2.1 The SDP should continue to operate while trimming activities in keeping with its budget constraints. While not thus far achieving the goals it set out in 2011, it has done much in terms in opening up opportunities for 'deepening the culture of democracy', which was the key goal that underpinned all activities.
- 2.2 With this in mind, the ET recommends that the SDP and UNDP Management revise its targets and objectives that they wish to achieve over the next two years and focus on a few key areas that would carry over to the next phase of Democratic Strengthening in Cambodia.
- 2.3 It is clear to the ET, that despite 20 years of institution building, a constitution that is based on the best of those around the world, that democracy has been receding, not improving in Cambodia. Nonetheless, donors such as UNDP and their partners have an obligation to continue to press on, to provoke debate and discussion, and lead the way for other like-minded donors to follow. UNDP is still considered the 'neutral' partner, particularly in sensitive areas like governance, and the organization must take better advantage of this prominence.

- 2.4 It has been illustrated that the activities are far too many with respect to the financial and capacity expectations of the SDP. Thus, the ET would recommend a revisiting of the RRF, and the annual work plans to ensure consolidation and aggregation of activities, rather than continue to implement a diffusive programme as it currently stands.
- 2.5 As noted in the 'Introduction' section, Cambodia has had mixed results with respect to Human Development Gains. This also poses a philosophical as well as historical guide for UNDP and partner organizations to consider. How do you deal with a government that is guided by an extremely liberal constitution, yet in application, a nation that is still led by those with close sympathies to single party systems? Where does the role of democracy come into play, while growth is the one of the highest in the region? Are there trade-offs? These are questions that the ET cannot answer, yet, have significant influences with respect to relating democracy, growth and inequality.
- 2.6 UNDP/SDP should carefully weigh the need for added staffing with respect to a revised RRF, for the next two years. Emphasis should be placed on adding capacity in priority areas over the next two years.
- 2.7 The Loy 9 programme and the partnership with BBC Media Action should continue. However, it cannot be sustained without commitments from donor partners, for additional funding that will enable core funding to be moved towards new prioritized activities. Thus a thorough budget analysis of funding versus activities needs to take place by UNDP management.
- 2.8 Furthermore, UNDP has to reach a decision on whether to continue to fund such activities in the future, given, a) the funding aspect and b) the fact that not much capacity is being built within national media outlets. A clear and smooth exit strategy should also be part of the deliberations with respect to the partnership with BBC Media Action.
- 2.9 The ET recommends that the engagement with disabled people and MSM be discontinued within the overall context of reprioritization. Working with marginalized groups is clearly within UNDP's mandate. However, there are other entities, perhaps better equipped to deal with the needs of MSM and People with Disabilities.
- 2.10 UNDP/SDP should continue to work with IPs. However, a comprehensive strategic plan, encompassing the work of other UNDP programmes, and other UN and non-UN programs should inform this planning.
- 2.11 The A2I component should be phased out, with the exception as noted earlier of providing exposure to other systems in other countries wherever possible. However, a targeted focus on attempting to push for A2I legislation in the ET's view is a non-starter.
- 2.12 The need to link up with sister UN organizations as well as UNDP's own structures is critical to ensure greater coherence. The ET has noted, this has not occurred, and perhaps has contributed to the critical analysis of the implementation strategy. It is

imperative for UNDP to ensure that all units are working together, not as singular projects, but as one portfolio of programmes.

- 2.13 With respect to media, building capacity to report independently and to understand their rights and responsibilities is critical.
- 2.14 The Direct Implementation System should continue. The ET has not commented on this as yet, however, it is clear the NEX is not a viable option with respect to the current conditions in Cambodia and will lead to even greater gridlock with respect to implementation. Having the DIS, in this sense then, allows UNDP a lot more flexibility to engage in 'pushing boundaries' and leading innovation. This was clearly conveyed to the ET by donor partners that UNDP has been too timid in its approach to furthering democratic engagement, and that many donors do look to UNDP to set agendas, where then they can follow. The next two years must be seen and utilized as an opportunity to follow through on this mandate.

Specific Recommendations for the Remaining Two Years

- 2.15 Youth, Media, CSOs and Parliamentary engagement are the key aspects of a revised programme, in the opinion of the ET.
- 2.16 It is recommended that despite the parliamentary gridlock that is on-going, that the SDP continue to focus on influencing parliamentary groupings and committees, especially taking advantage of South-South regional gatherings and conferences. In this respect, the ET would encourage the 'advocacy' element of parliamentary engagement, rather than the constituent-legislator relationship originally envisioned in the programme. Moreover, UNDP should work with the parliament even if there is no viable opposition in committees.
- 2.17 It is highly recommended that the SDP focus on the goal of Women's Political Participation and Decision Making in the overall context of deepening democracy. Sustained efforts should be made to engage with like-minded partners such as UN Women and other civil society organizations.
- 2.18 Working with the Women's Forum in Parliament (already in the RRF) would be an excellent entry point that could benefit from other agencies also working on the same capacity issues of Women MPs. The ET strongly suggests this as a key priority area to shift funding towards.
- 2.19 The strategy of convening and consolidating a consortium of Civil Society Organizations has not occurred. The role of civil society as an instrument of deepening democracy cannot be over-stated. In this regard, the ET would strongly recommend that the SDP get back to its original objectives of identifying civil society entities that are 'engaged in democracy building', undertake specific capacity building, and devise strategies on how best to utilize them as partners in future activities.

- 2.20 The focus on Youth should continue to be a foremost priority. However, as with Loy 9, now that the 'electoral cycle' is over, programs and strategies should shift to issues of employment, education and other development issues.
- 2.21 And finally UNDP should now start discussion with partners on the next phase of sustaining and deepening democracy in Cambodia, with the intent of enabling true partnerships of implementation as well as in securing funding commitments.
- 2.22 The ET would not recommend as large, ambitious and diffusive a programme as the current SDP for the next phase. The new project should be very strategic, interlinked with other UNDP programmes as well as relevant partners, and prioritize critical areas for support.